

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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"A LEAL LASS."

BY RICHARD ASHE KING.

CHAPTER XII. NEGOTIATION.

FRED and Dredge, on reaching London, made at once for Pratt's address in Stepney, where, however, he had only stopped in passing. "He had gone South," said his landlady, but whether she meant Battersea or Italy, by "South," they could not tell, nor, seemingly, could she. It was probably not Italy, as she expected him back "shortly." As nothing more definite as to time or place could be extracted from her, our two friends were fain to content themselves with leaving a note to say that it would be greatly to Pratt's profit to see Fred forthwith, and promising to send their address to-night, and to call again in the morning.

Then our two friends took the train back to Fenchurch Street in very low spirits.

"He's gone on the spree, the sweep! He'll drink it dry to the last penny," growled Dredge.

But Fred had just as little doubt that Pratt had gone down to Hawthornden to see Gower, or his father, and to extort a good round sum from them for the letters. He remained wretchedly silent, while Dredge snarled viciously about the certain loss of his fifty pounds.

Encouraged by Fred's silence, which he interpreted to mean a guilty consciousness of his share in the diversion of this fifty pounds from its due destination, he said presently: "Well, it's not my look-out, nor my money."

But Fred, though he heard, did not at all take in the implied threat to hold him answerable for the fifty pounds. Where-

fore Dredge began again, and with greater confidence and bluster.

"Look here, Beresford; I can't give you more than three days, and you had better go about to get the money at once; for it's my belief that the beggar either won't turn up at all, or will turn up drunk and drained out."

Then Fred was roused to take in not only this, but the former hint about "its not being Dredge's look-out," which had remained, as it were, in the ante-chamber of his mind, waiting for admittance.

"You may just fight it out between you, you infernal pair of vampires," he cried suddenly and savagely.

This brought Dredge to his knees at once, for there was no mistaking the sincerity, and even ferocity, of Fred's defiance.

"Hang it all! It's bad enough to lose my money without being slanged into the bargain," he whined in an injured tone.

"Your money! What's your money to—?" Here Fred suddenly remembered and checked himself. After a gloomy pause, he added more calmly: "If that scoundrel turns up with those letters of Gower's, you'll get what you call 'your money' twice over for them."

Now that the prospect of recovering the letters, and, with the letters, his single security against prosecution for forgery, seemed little less than hopeless to Fred, he realised all they meant to him.

With this promise Dredge was fain to be content; since it was perfectly evident that Fred's imagination, at least, had touched bottom, where no threat of sinking him deeper could affect it.

As Fred lived more from hand to mouth and trusted more to the chapter of accidents than most young men, he recovered

enough from the worst of his despondency to try to drown the rest of it in dissipation.

During the rest of the week the two youths rose in the afternoon in the blackest depression after the night's dissipation, and hurried down to Stepney to inquire for Pratt, and to receive always the same stereotyped reply, that he had not yet returned, nor written, but that he might come back at any moment, and that the moment he did the letter left for him should be handed to him. Having discovered that the landlady was a near relation of the deceased Mrs. Pratt, they took care to tell her that "there was money in it," in order to quicken her memory and zeal; but, as she did not really know Pratt's address or plans, this assurance of theirs was not of much service to them. Each afternoon, then, they returned to town in deeper and deeper gloom and glumness, of which they could rid themselves only by deeper and deeper dissipation.

It may be imagined how such a week told on Fred's nerves, until at its close he lost what little hope had remained to him. He had now no doubt at all of what he had had little doubt from the first, that Pratt had gone down to Hawthornden to sell Gower's letters to his father. Whether he had or had not succeeded in selling them, the mere negotiation itself would cut the ground from under Fred's only defence, or rather palliation of his forgery; while the loss of the letters meant to him the loss of his one hostage against prosecution.

All this, in itself sufficiently probable, seemed to Fred, in his present unnerved state, certain. But had his forgery come yet to light? Of this alone he suffered himself to doubt. There was yet time to escape if only he had the means; but he had not. He had spent nearly all that remained to him of the proceeds of the forged cheque upon Dredge and himself in that mad week, and escape without money was impossible.

Where was he to get the necessary sum? Having reviewed all his friends in turn, and in vain, he was giving up hope in heartsick despair, when May's friend, Miss Hick, occurred to him. Hence his application to her. If his forgery had been already discovered this application meant nothing less than giving himself in charge for the crime; but he must risk this, since there was no one else to whom he could apply for the means of escape with the faintest prospect of success. Miss Hick, too, who knew everything in Hammersley, would know whether things went on as

usual at the Vicarage, and whether Gower had been summoned home by an enraged father.

This was the interpretation of that letter to Miss Hick which had so perplexed May. Fred, after many and miserable searchings of heart, having decided at last that such an appeal to Miss Hick, however dangerous, was his one chance of escape from danger, had composed as diplomatic a despatch as he could put together.

Having at last mustered the courage to post this letter in an out-of-the-way pillar-box—with some vague notion of so securing secrecy—he plunged once more into his Lethean river of dissipation, only to find haggard remorse waiting for him on the other bank the next morning.

He waked and rose early, and hurried out to wander aimlessly all day in by-streets, fury-driven by the fear that Miss Hick would hand over his letter to the police, who would wire his address to Scotland Yard. His nerves were so shattered that he was out of all heart and hope, and hardly doubted either that his forgery was discovered, or that the police were put upon his track by Miss Hick.

Only at night did he venture to creep back to his lodgings, which he reconnoitred for nearly an hour before he dared enter them. Immense was his relief to find that no one had been to look for him.

Dredge had decamped upon Fred's mysterious disappearance; under the impression that Fred, having been "cleared out," had left him in pledge for the rent, which the extremely scanty luggage the two youths had brought for a couple of days' stay in town would have gone but a little way towards defraying. Wherefore his landlady welcomed Fred effusively; for, if there is one warmer welcome than that given a coming guest by a landlady—according to Shenstone—it is the welcome given to a returning guest, who has left only his unpaid bill behind him.

Dredge's flight was almost a relief to Fred. It is true that with him went all hope of putting the screw on Pratt for the recovery of Gower's letters; but, as Fred, notwithstanding his reaction of hope on finding neither the police nor even his father awaiting him, was still persuaded that Pratt had shown the letters to Sir George, he did not regret Dredge's desertion.

If, however, there was no hope now at all of recovering the letters, there was still hope of escape by flight. Had his forgery come to light it would

have first been heard of in Hammersley, and Miss Hick would have hastened to give his address, if not to the police, at least to his father, who would have taken the next train to town, and have been awaiting him in his lodgings. It had not yet come to light therefore; and he would have time to quit the country to-morrow—if Miss Hick sent him the means.

It was curious how his spirits rose, not through the reaction from despair merely, but at the prospect of quitting the country, and ending, at one blow, all his troubles. He would wipe the slate clean, and start fresh in America or Australia; he would have done with his debts and duns, and examinations, and the thrice odious prospect of the ministry, and start fair in a new country, on a new career of his own choosing. That he would have done with his father also, and with his idolising mother and sister, did not trouble him much. His father he rather feared than loved, and the idolatry of his mother and sister was an irksome and continual tax upon him; it compelled him to an unrelaxing constraint and hypocrisy in their presence, which was as uncomfortable as walking always on tiptoe, or posing on a pedestal as a statue; he despised them both, indeed, for their infatuation, and showed his contempt for that of his mother only too often and evidently. Still he had always, when at home, to act up to it in some measure; and from this worry also he would henceforth be free!

Really, this was the way the idolised Fred regarded, for the most part, a flight from home, which would simply break both his mother's and his sister's hearts! No doubt, if he saw their agony under his very eyes, he would take it into account and be moved and made uncomfortable by the spectacle; but "out of sight, out of mind," would explain a good deal of Fred's fickleness and heartlessness. The here and the now were everything to him; yesterday, to-morrow, the absent, and the distant, nothing.

On the whole, then, Fred was relieved by the prospect of escape by flight from his troubles. It would be an escape, not only from justice and a jail, but from college, from the church, and from home. Wherefore, he felt lighter-hearted that evening than he had done for some time when left alone with his thoughts. He was too tired to go to his usual haunts or even to stay up long. He went to bed, slept soundly, and rose early in eager ex-

pectation of Miss Hick's reply. He hurried downstairs at the sound of the postman's knock to find a letter from May, as well as one from Miss Hick, awaiting him. This revived all yesterday's terrors for a moment, since Miss Hick must, he thought, have had some very strong reason for taking May into her confidence and giving her his address in spite of his adjuring the old lady to secrecy. He tore open Miss Hick's letter first, and looked at once within it for the cheque, which he extracted with shaking hand and examined greedily. Much encouraged, he proceeded to spell out the old lady's curiously-cramped hand to discover if she had heard anything either of Gower's letters or of his own forgery.

"DEAR FRED,—I enclose cheque for fifty pounds, which I hope is for a good purpose. I hear sad stories of your wildness; but I always warned your father against sending you to college and into the Church. It is only putting temptation in a young man's way, and sooner or later he gets entangled with someone and has to pay for it, like you. If I were you I should put it into the hands of a lawyer, who would get you out of it for ten pounds, or less, I dare say. If you will go to my lawyer, Mr. Sleigh, of 4, Webb Court, Fleet Street, and show him this letter, he will do what he can for you, I know. Only lawyers can deal properly with such designing persons. Take my advice and go to him and tell him everything.

"They are all well at the Vicarage, and Mr. Gower is still there. Is it true that he has been very wild? I have particular reasons for wanting to know. Be sure you tell me this in acknowledging the receipt of the money—of course in confidence—and let me know, too, if you consulted Mr. Sleigh. I have written to Mr. Sleigh to prepare him for your visit.

"Believe me, very truly yours,

"EUPHEMIA HICK.

"P.S.—Is Mr. Gower his father's only son or eldest son?"

It is very easy to see through Miss Hick's not quite disinterested advice to Fred to consult her lawyer. She was raging with anxiety to hear all about Fred's entanglement with the scandalous young person of whose existence, character, and greed she had really no doubt at all; and in her letter to Mr. Sleigh, she demanded from him the details of the case as they might be communicated to him by her young friend Mr. F. Beresford.

At the same time it is only fair to say that she was sure Fred could find no quicker, cheaper, and surer way of extrication from this entanglement than that which Mr. Sleigh would open out for him. As for her particular reasons for wanting to know of Mr. Gower's wildness, they were curiosity and the belief that he must sooner or later fall in love with May.

Fred, however, naturally inferred from this part of her epistle that "The Hammersley Gazette" had heard of Gower's letters to Patty Pratt, and of Fred's connection therewith, through Pratt's attempt to sell them. He tore open May's letter, expecting to find in it confirmation of this; but was greatly relieved and surprised by its silence on the subject.

"DEAR OLD FRED,—I am wretchedly anxious about you. What is the matter? Do tell me, dear old boy. Miss Hick has told me nothing—except that she was sending you a loan—and I got your address only from the envelope of the letter she gave me to post to you. I think you may feel quite sure of her saying nothing about the loan to any one but me; and, of course, telling me didn't matter. I know that you didn't write yourself to me about it, because you didn't want to worry me with troubles that I could do nothing to lighten. That is so like you, dear Fred; but if you knew how it worries me, imagining all kinds of dreadful things, you would write and tell me everything. But now that she has sent you the money, there is nothing to tell, perhaps; and, perhaps, you will be able to come home to-morrow! I do so wish you could, and would, as I just long to see you; and, besides, there's Mr. Gower, who must think your staying away very odd, and who is bored nearly to death, poor man! He bears up bravely, but I can see the terrible life he leads here is telling on him! Fancy him inspecting mills, examining the Second Standard, and Mr. Spratt's black-beetles! It's no wonder he's so dreadfully subdued and 'not in the least like' what I expected from your account of him. You'll say I bore him, and, of course I do—I always know I am boring people when I feel bored by them, and this makes me sure his sufferings must be something terrible. But what can I do? Do come to his rescue—and mine—before it's too late! See how my spirits rise at the prospect of seeing you soon, dear old Fred—to-morrow, perhaps? Do, do come to-morrow; and, if not, at least write to-morrow.—Ever, dear Fred, your loving sister, MAY."

"P.S.—Father seems troubled about you, and mother is really miserable with anxiety. I think it would be better for you to write to her or to father than to me to-morrow, if you can't come then."

Fred ran through this letter without noticing the suggestive reaction and rise of feeling of the latter half as contrasted with the depression expressed in the former, without noticing anything indeed beyond the absence of all hint of trouble to Gower. If there had been any row about the letters, May would have known of it before Miss Hick. Besides, Gower would most certainly have hurried home instead of drivelling about the parish with Spratt or May.

If, then, there had been no row about the letters, Pratt had not gone down with them to Sir George's, and there was hope yet of their redemption. Was there hope enough of their redemption to keep him in England? If he could extort them from Pratt, by Dredge's aid or otherwise, would they be an adequate hostage in his hands against a prosecution by Sir George for forgery?

He paced the room up and down weighing these considerations till a knock at the door brought him to a stand.

"Please, sir, a Mr. Pratt wants to see you."

Pratt!—and Dredge gone!

"Show him up," Fred answered, when he had recovered from his surprise.

Mr. Pratt was shown up accordingly. He entered the room with an incongruous mixture of defence and defiance in his manner, and as though carrying peace or war in his toga.

"I understand you want to see me," he said, weighing his greasy hat between both hands.

After a moment's pause for thought, Fred plunged headlong into business.

"Yes, I want to see you about those letters of Mr. Gower's. They must have fallen out of your pocket that evening when you were tight, for I found them in a corner of my room next morning, just after you left me."

"H'm!"

"I found them near where you had been sitting, and put them into my desk, where you found them," Fred stammered desperately.

"Ay, I found 'em," replied Pratt, with an exceeding and exasperating dryness.

This rasping manner was maddening to Fred, in the irritable state to which dis-

sipation had reduced him ; but he was even more cowed than exasperated by the insolence of the man's manner.

"Mr. Gower would be glad to get them back," he said, somewhat helplessly.

Pratt's sole reply was an odious laugh.

"What do you want for them ?" asked Fred, with irrepressible irritation.

"That's for the jury—for a British jury to say," retorted Pratt blusteringly.

"A jury ! What's a jury got to do with it ?" asked Fred, with a feeble affectation of perplexity.

"Come, come, Mr. Beresford ; you know what's in them letters as well as me. You read 'em when you stole 'em, I reckon ; and you read a Breach of Promise in every one on 'em. Cut 'em, shuffle 'em, and deal 'em as you like to a British jury, and there's a verdict in any one on 'em to the tune of five thousand pounds !"

"When they see the lady's letters ?" sneered Fred.

"The lady's letters wor lady's letters, an' wor letters written to a gentleman," retorted Pratt venomously.

But the retort only suggested a telling rejoinder to Fred.

"But there are letters, written by this lady, which can be, and which will be produced in Court ; and there's a verdict in any one of them, as you put it, of just one farthing, or less."

This shaft shot home.

Fred had unfortunately destroyed Pattie's precious epistles to himself ; but this her father could not know. He was so evidently disconcerted, that Fred followed up his advantage :

"The fact is, Mr. Pratt, those letters are just worth the paper they're written on, and no more. However, Mr. Gower will be glad to buy them back, to save them from being shown all over Cambridge."

"Has he sent you on this business ?"

"Yes ; he's staying with us at present, and he asked me to see you about them."

Pratt remained silent, turning this thing over and over in his own mind : "Would Fred, for friendship's sake, allow letters from Pattie, which would cover himself with shame, to be exposed to a grinning Court and public ?" Suddenly a thought occurred to him to decide him.

"How much ?" he asked sulkily.

"A pound a-piece."

Pratt turned sharply upon his heel ; but before he reached the door Fred arrested him by asking in turn :

"Well, how much ?"

After a long haggle, Pratt asked a few days to consider, and to fetch the letters from Cambridge.

GREAT PRESERVERS.

NEW lamps for old ; broad, new avenues for narrow, old streets ; new theatres, so new, that their foundations are not yet laid ; palatial rows of shops and warerooms, existing only in the imagination, or as elevations in the portfolios of speculative architects ; all the promise of these brave new thoroughfares, which shall be so imposing and splendid in years to come ; all the actual performance of the present in the way of wooden hoardings, and notices of building-sites for sale, with broken ends of old-fashioned streets and dusky back premises, studded with boards announcing ancient lights, all this breaking down of old London and building it up anew, raises a feeling of amazement in one who is searching for Soho. Here it was once, but where is it now ? How to pick up the ends of these vanished streets and follow the old familiar tracks, when there is nothing but width and length, and perspectives of wooden hoardings, with vacancy brooding over all, as a starting point for the search ? But the name of Sutton Street strikes the eye, and at once the feeling of being out of all topographical soundings is removed. For here is the Catholic Church, which represents the old saloon of Carlisle House—the scene of Madame Cornely's balls and routs, a hundred years ago—and where carriages and chairs were once thickly crowded, waiting to take up or set down the patched and powdered beauties of the day ; now are waiting carts and railway vans, and general vehicles, to take up crates of pickles, boxes of jams and marmalade, cases of those tinned delicacies that travel all over the world, and are relished as well under the gleaming Dog-star as in the frosty regions of Arcturus.

Yes, these be now the enchantments of Soho, enchantments that have raised big warehouses and factories, aligned upon the new thoroughfare, with buildings where the delicate manipulations of the cuisine are carried on, and whose aromatic influence attracts us even into Soho Square. Pleasant old square ; what generations have feasted, and danced, and passed away behind those warm and hand-

some façades, with windows brightly shining; with honest substantial dignity of pilasters, friezes, and other embellishments! The great mansion of the Duke of Monmouth, which once occupied nearly the whole of the south side of the square, has vanished utterly, as well as Carlisle House at the corner by Sutton Street, and the buildings that have replaced them are hardly older than the century; but houses still remain that date from the time of Queen Anne or the earlier Georges. It is within living memory that the square was still a place of residence of distinction, if not of the latest mode. In the south-west corner lived Mr. Barnes of the "*Times*," a potentate whose influence exceeded that of any editor before or since, a real Jupiter Tonans, whose voice influenced the fate of Ministries, and who was looked upon as the arbiter of contending parties. That finely-ornamented house in the opposite corner belonged to some famous physician, and is now a hospital for Diseases of the Heart.

But the handsomest and best preserved of these old houses is No. 21, one of the row now occupied by Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell, which was once the town-house of Thomas Belasye, Lord Fauconberg. This was the grandson of the first Lord Fauconberg, who fought for King Charles at Marston Moor; but the family—like their friends the Fairfaxes—were of a Presbyterian turn, and, during the Commonwealth, our Lord Fauconberg married Mary, the daughter of the Lord Protector. The family has long been extinct; but the house still retains traces of its ancient dignity. The rooms are lofty and well proportioned, and, in some of the upper ones, the highly-enriched ceilings have been preserved and restored, and there are fine open hearths and richly-carved chimney-pieces, with armorial bearings emblazoned here and there.

Thus handsomely housed are the ledgers and cash-books of the great preserving firm. Here is a celerity, silence, and order that suggest the offices of some important bank or public company; but we may cease to wonder at the scale on which affairs are conducted when we reflect that there is nothing more important, either in an army or in the world in general, than the commissariat department.

And how great the demand is everywhere for condiments of all kinds, and for portable forms of nourishment that render people independent of cooks, as well as for

the luscious conserves of all kinds of fruits that are now found on every table, a demand which increases in the sturdy proportions of the increase of the Anglo-Saxon race.

When we leave the orderly precincts of the counting-houses of Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell, and enter by some short but mysterious passage into another set of buildings, a wonderful scene meets the eye. Nor is the entertainment confined to the eye; there is an odour that makes one feel hungry. Here is a company of men-cooks, in their regulation white costume, with attendant kitchen-maids, or helpers of the female sex. Here are vegetables being chopped; there are the savoury steams of frying. It is all soup, soup, mock-turtle, julienne, what you will—each little tin has its due allowance of meat and condiment, each its due proportion of stock, and passes on in never-ending procession to its final boiling-up, and hermetically sealing stage.

This vision passes away, and next is a great room, with machinery in full whirr. Here are sausages, twining out in long succession; weighed, and placed in tins; and then, having gone through the usual processes, will turn up some day at breakfast-tables far away. Then there are protected vessels, where great knives whirl round and reduce the flesh of beeves and swine into a soft, pulpy substance, which presently—in gallipots, with each its snowy covering of clarified butter—will tempt the jaded appetite as potted meat.

In the manipulation of all these things, women are chiefly employed, with men to perform any heavy work, and to attend to the machinery. Women, neat and clean, with long white aprons enveloping them from head to foot. Upstairs and downstairs, too, women are at work, wrapping, packing, pasting. They are grown women mostly, tall and strong, who go about their work with the intentness and resolution of people who are paid by the piece, and not by time.

It is a wonderful army, this, of working women, of which we catch a glimpse here and there—in the ranks of which a new character for women seems in course of development. Silent, rather than talkative, self-reliant, somewhat cynical—these are traits that seem to mark the coming woman, if she be not actually come. There are many good women who, taking the lead in social movements, continually ask for more employments to be open for

women; but one's impression—derived from sampling, so to say, a good many industries—is that women are helping themselves pretty freely in that line, and that the most burning question of the future will be what is to be done with the men. These remarks are not particularly appropriate to our present subject, but they are irresistibly suggested by the sight of all these industrious women, with their grave faces, nimble hands, and steadfast demeanour.

It is now the time of oranges. Swift steamers have crossed the seas from Spain and the Azores, from Sicily and all those shores where the golden fruit is grown to perfection. The round-topped cases have been piled at the docks, the warehouses about Eastcheap and the Monument have been crammed with the fresh arrivals, and a goodly quantity from the pleasant groves of Seville have found their way to Soho Square.

Here is an enormous cauldron of them freshly boiled. Nimble fingers open them with knives, strip the skins of their pulp, which falls into another vat, and the rinds, passed to another row of female operatives, are pressed into machines like chaff-cutters on a reduced scale, where they are sliced into shavings so fine that a handful of them feels like a ball of down.

Mixed with the pulp, and with a due proportion of syrup, we may follow the mixture into a long room higher up, where stand, on massive pedestals, some fifty or sixty polished brazen vases. Each vase will hold two hundred pounds of marmalade; for such we may call it now.

And there are men-cooks here, who walk to and fro, and take note of how the pots are boiling. For, by turning a tap, jets of steam are introduced into the brazen vase, and its contents are forthwith in brisk ebullition.

In fifteen minutes the two hundred pounds of marmalade will be completely cooked. Then the steam will be turned off, and, after that, another tap will be opened, which communicates with a pipe that drains off the whole boiling into a lower room where it will be soon ready for the process of potting and bottling.

Now, if you have fifty of these vases, each capable of boiling two hundred pounds of marmalade in fifteen minutes, it is a nice little problem that may be solved without the aid of algebra, as to the quantity that may be produced in so many working hours.

By the way, while on the subject of marmalade, here is an old manuscript receipt of the year 1650, or thereabouts, which shows that our ancestors were acquainted with the thing itself and appreciated it, although they had not yet given it a name: "Take bark of oranges, lemons, citrons; first boyl them whol till they be soft, then make a syrup with sugar and the liquor you boiled them in, and keep the barks in the sugar. They are kept in glasses or glassed pots. The preserve will keep a yeer, if you can forbear eating of them."

It would not be possible to witness the operations of preserving our native fruits, and the making of marmalade, at the same time; the march of the seasons will not permit such a conjunction. We can only take a glimpse at the reserve supplies of jam in great jars, which are ranged in their appropriate store-rooms. But pickles are always with us; here are onions in barrels, chiefly from Essex, and broccoli from Kent, and great pans of piccalilli, the latter more popular, perhaps, than any other form of pickle.

Then there is the popular calves' foot jelly, which is slowly being filtered through gigantic jelly bags, and which comes out with a clearness and lucidity which the most skilful housewife of old could not always secure. When the jelly is finally run into bottles and corked, it is necessary to expel the air that remains in the neck of the bottle, and this is done by placing the bottles—whole battalions of them at once—into a bath of boiling water, the corks being secured each one by an iron clamp. The cork gives sufficiently to allow of the escape of the heated air, while, as the bottle cools, the pressure of the outside air drives the cork firmly home. It takes a long pull and a strong pull to uncork that bottle; but any other way the jelly might become mouldy at the top, and, acquainted with this fact, you will not repine at the exercise of a little surplus energy over the corkscrew.

While taking notice of all these things we have been led hither and thither, through covered ways and over bridges from one building to another, till it is a matter of uncertainty as to whether we are near Soho Square. But anyhow here in a quiet and polished seclusion is a lofty engine-room, where a bright and shining steam-engine performs its functions almost silently, and where the mouths of six furnaces under as many steam-boilers open

into the depths below. The boilers furnish steam for the various processes of boiling, cooking, and macerating that are always going on. And with shafts, and drums, and bands, the engine sets in motion the various labour-saving contrivances all over the place. Then there is a cooperage, where casks are put together, and cases of various kinds ; while of rooms devoted to bottling, canning, soldering, and other processes, it is easy to lose count. Numbers of women, too, are engaged in labelling, in capsuling, in wrapping. You pass from room to room, from warehouse to warehouse. Soho in general seems to be honeycombed with the offshoots and annexes of the great purveying firm.

If we could but summon up the shade of one of the farmer's housewives of old, how the respectable old ghost would open her eyes at the sight of all these buildings, and these companies of male and female artificers engaged in the work she used to perform almost single-handed, with her skillets and copper saucepans in her old-fashioned kitchen and still-room !

All this time we have said nothing about sauces, and for the good and sufficient reason that there is nothing revealed to the outer world of the manner of compounding these recondite essences. There are secrets about sauces which are only known to the initiated, and when you consider that not long ago the part proprietor of a favourite sauce died worth more than half-a-million of money, you can judge how carefully such precious secrets must be guarded.

But we have seen and explored enough, thanks to the courtesy of the proprietors of this great establishment, and so we pass out into the quiet, business-like precincts of the old-fashioned square. The flambeaux, the carriages, the lacqueys, the young bloods with swords and periwigs, the powdered dames in flowered sacques, and hoops, and stomachers, the running footmen, the pugnacious chairmen, all those who once frequented the fashionable haunts of the square, rise for a moment before the mind's eye, and then we make our obeisance to the modern "genius loci," and hail the first omnibus that is passing along the new avenue towards Charing Cross.

AN EASY CHANGE WHEN WANTED

"THIS is indeed a change," said an amiable lady, as we drove, with her London-worn husband, in an open carriage,

along an up-hill road. "The change is so complete that the doctor, were he here, could not help approving our obedience to his instructions."

"And this open country, with fields as unenclosed as if they were waste land, whereas they are highly cultivated ; this undulating landscape, a grand mosaic of variously-tinted greens and browns, with here and there a yellow patch of flowering colza, to furnish lamp-oil by-and-by, so brilliant and bright that few of your painters dare put that in their pictures ; and this gradual slope, over which the eye wanders to the right and the left, without interruption, screen, or impediment—do you like it ?"

"I hardly know, though it is refreshing to our lungs as well as novel to our sight. Perhaps I might, if I were used to it."

"I am used to it and do like it now. A walk into the country here produces the same effect as emerging in autumn from one of your plantation-bound, ring-fenced, over-timbered parks, to the outspread space of a breezy common."

"But if our road is not bounded by hedge-rows it is at least adorned by one mark of civilisation—milestones."

"I beg your pardon ; there are no miles here, but kilomètres, of which that stone marks the end of one and the beginning of another. A kilomètre, you know, is a thousand mètres, a mètre being the ten-millionth part of the arc of the terrestrial meridian comprised between the North Pole and the Equator."

"You are taking me a little out of my depth, I fear."

"Not a bit of it. You must have learnt the use of the globe at school. The mètre measures all lengths in France, from ribbons to railways. Four kilomètres make a league—two miles and a half. The comparison, therefore, of French with English measured distances is a capital exercise in mental arithmetic. But if you desire shelter we are nearing the forest."

"Ah, yes ; I see it before us. That will be again a change."

"This bit of it will soon be traversed, for it is only the sag-end of the woods, which stretch for miles—I mean kilomètres—to the left, along the summit of this range of hills. From them I procure nearly all my fuel. We burn wood everywhere in the house except in the 'cuisinière,' or cooking-stove. Being on the chalk, with no stagnant pools, the air is fresh and pure. In early summer, invalids come

here to bask in sunny nooks and glades, and to breathe the oxygen emitted by the growing leaves. From spring to autumn there is a successional series, in various spots best suited to their nature, of lovely flowers, some far from common. I am acquainted with a little girl, the daughter of a forest-keeper, so fond of pretty plants that she rambles through the thickets in search of her favourites without ever losing her way. She brings me choice specimens of terrestrial orchids, whose blossoms mimic flies and humble bees, which I persuade to flower in my little garden."

"But is she not afraid of wild animals?"

"She has no reason to be afraid. Once a year, when hazel nuts are ripe, a report is spread that a wolf has been seen in the forest; but no one ever says that he has seen it. Foxes run away and hide. Vipers do not bite unless hurt. In winter, the woodmen find sleeping dormice, which are in some request as schoolboys' pets. Wild boars there were none till the Franco-German war, when, frightened by the firing, they decamped from the Vosges and favoured us with their presence. Finding their new quarters pleasant, they remain."

"But are they dangerous?"

"Not unless you attack them; which no one in his senses would, unarmed. Our sportsmen keep their numbers down, and proud, indeed, they are of showing the head, or even a handful of the bristles, of the boar that they have slain. But we are out of the wood now, so we may shout when we like. Only, please shut your eyes for a moment."

"Why? Are we coming to anything horrible?"

"No; quite the contrary. At last we are at the top of the eminence. The horses will be glad of a few minutes' breathing time. Now, open sesame! Behold! I knew a poor consumptive fellow who, the day before he died, begged to be driven here in order to look once more at that. It will not tire, for a while at least. Yonder, that blue streak in the horizon is the English Channel; that brown elevation is the back of Cape Blanzez, whose white cliffs face Folkestone and Dover; behind and below us lies the forest, like a wide-spread carpet of tufted green wool embroidery; farther on is the alluvial plain which stretches into Belgium; before us, cottages, hills, rows of trees, village spires, and fields, are so nicely grouped and distributed that you will see them sooner, and better than I am able to enumerate them."

In short, my friends were so satisfied with their experimental trip, that I thought I might be doing others a service by putting on paper a few hints that may interest those who are inclined to try the good effects on mind and body, produced by change of air and scene for longer or shorter periods.

A recreative excursion, a rushing tour, is not what is here meant by a change, which implies a rest, a period of repose. The first only asks the question, "Whither, and back again?" The other makes the calm inquiry, "Where?"

For those who decide to essay their change in France, the Department of the Pas-de-Calais offers great convenience. It is pleasant to find on your breakfast-table letters and journals posted in London the previous evening. Residence at a greater distance inland, of course, involves a longer delay in delivery—which is sometimes of importance. Certainly, there is the telegraph, when communication is urgent; but the telegraph, unfortunately, does not yet convey passengers in case of emergency.

The climate of the north of France greatly resembles that of the South of England; on the coast it is, perhaps, more variable, but perhaps, also, clearer. You can breathe without having your windpipe rasped and scraped by London fog. The fruits of the centre and the south—cherries, greengages, melons, grapes—are brought to you by railway, early, rapidly, and cheaply, without your having to bear the heats that have ripened them.

In the central region of France, while the summers are splendid the winters are so sharp that evergreens which remain throughout the year in English gardens—arbutus, laurustinus, laurel—are obliged to be sheltered in greenhouses, or otherwise protected.

Plants are an unerring test of climate. At Montpellier they show you a lofty bay-tree in proof of the mildness of their winters.

In the sunny South, where invalids and others love to winter at their ease, the heat, for several months in the year, compels you to remain indoors from eight in the morning till five or six in the evening—unless you choose to justify the Italians who say that, between those hours, none but dogs and Englishmen are to be seen in the streets. Soldiers even, for their health's sake, are confined to barracks during the middle of the day. Such a climate detracts considerably from the eligi-

bility of the South for a permanent sojourn; to which inconvenience may be added the superabundance of insects.

On the other hand, it ought, in justice, to be mentioned, that living is cheaper in the South, partly because the distance checks the persistent drain of provisions for the supply of England, and partly because wine is there included in table-d'hôte, and such like charges, whereas, in the North, it is an extra.

In the South you may enjoy to your hearts', and, perhaps, to your healths' content, delicious but perishable fruits, which bear carriage badly.

In a market at Bordeaux, tempted by fine, plump, round, purple figs which brought the water into my mouth, I asked the price. The woman gravely and solemnly answered :

" Monsieur, the season is advanced, and the fruit is choice. You must not haggle. I cannot let you have them for less than three sous the dozen."

On entering Pau one morning, the first person who accosted me was a fruit-seller offering delicious little blue figs, all covered with untouched bloom, fifteen for a sou. With those, and a penny roll of bread, I made a capital lunch, which supported me well till the table-d'hôte dinner hour.

If one comes to stay a while in France, it is desirable to have some knowledge, even if very little, of the language—such as the numerals, the months, the days of the week, and the weights and measures; which last are very simple and easy to acquire, being based on the decimal metrical system. In large towns, there are sure to be shops with "English spoken" labelled on the windows. In hotels, an Englishman's wants are readily understood and responded to; but in really country places, French must be spoken, no matter how broken and ungrammatical, otherwise, you might as well be wandering along the steppes of Central Asia. Speak it you must, somehow, indifferently or badly; better will come with study and practice. You may have French, which you will have learnt by reading, in your head; but it will require oiling, and some courage, to bring it out from the tongue. Those who hesitate to make use of a foreign language until they can speak it quite correctly, are like the mother who forbade her son to bathe in the river, until he had learned to swim. Hence the disadvantage of residing abroad, where English colonies exclusively associate together.

One warm summer's afternoon, while tramping at some little distance from Boulogne, with the intention of reaching, not the town, but a village on the coast, I encountered an individual who tried hard to address me in French, and failed. Pitying his vain efforts, I said to him : " I think you will get on better in English. If I guess rightly, you wish to know where you can get a nice cool glass of light French beer. Yes? Walk with me then a little way, and I will introduce you to what you want."

He did walk with me, and confessed that after residing twelve years in Boulogne he had made no further progress in French than that. He has still to pass his competitive examination.

For those who, while on pleasure bent, are still, like Mrs. Gilpin, of frugal mind, it is an agreeable, as well as a convenient circumstance, that, in provincial France, in the country, and in small country towns, no one is despised or looked down upon for leading a quiet, unpretending life—provided every debt is duly paid, or, what is better, all debts avoided. Economy, saving, sometimes parsimony, is the general rule with the French provincial middle-classes, work-people, and peasantry. They do not disapprove of other folk's practising what they practise themselves.

Consequently, there is no need, as often happens in England, for a family to strain every point, and even to pinch and deny themselves sundry little comforts, for the sake of keeping up appearances. "Parafire," to make a show, is considered worthless in comparison with "être," to be in easy circumstances and to have money in one's pocket or in safe deposit.

"Mangeurs d'argent," eaters-up of money, as spendthrifts are called, are rare among the working-classes in the country. Nevertheless, such cases do occur, almost always the consequence of some unexpected legacy or divisional inheritance falling in. It is then an example of the beggar on horseback, the horse ridden being mostly named "Drink." The ride goes on at a rapid pace; and the rider often cleverly contrives to die of his good luck just at the moment when his funds are exhausted.

His premature end excites no pity, for him at least; but people do pity the money so stupidly spent, which might have been put to a better purpose—to wit, in the purchase of a cottage and a bit of land, or invested in the Three per Cents. when the

funds are low, or treasured in an old stocking beneath the mattress.

Respectable people, living on their income and paying their way, do not lose caste if the lady assists in housework, makes her own bed, helps to do the choice part of the cooking, and manages to get on with the aid of a charwoman twice or thrice a week, or even does without one altogether. French folk, with a good-sized, well-furnished house, will live almost entirely in the kitchen, reserving their salon and their "salle-à-manger" for grand occasions; though they hardly reach the exclusiveness of certain Dutch ladies, who would refuse to show their state apartments to an emperor, because they are sure he would not take off his shoes.

In like manner, there is no need for strangers or temporary residents to be over-anxious about their costume, so long as it is neither too swell nor too shabby. Naturally, an economical people does not trouble itself overmuch about dress. Everybody that is anybody, and a good many that are nobody, have their Sunday suit hanging in their closet, ready for fête days, weddings, and funerals. For week days, if it be but clean, warm, and whole, that suffices.

It follows that you must not estimate a man's means by his outward attire. You will meet many whom you would never suspect, at least at first sight, to be rich, but who are rich notwithstanding. To some extent they take after a certain miserly country banker who, when reproached by his friends for wearing such old and threadbare clothes, replied :

"What does it signify? Everybody knows me."

"But when you go to London," they said, "it is just the same."

"What does it matter?" was again his answer. "Nobody knows me."

And it must be admitted that both those excuses were valid.

Under the Second Empire, however, a large developement of the love of finery, amongst middle and working-class females, set in. Showy gowns, exaggerating the fashionable absurdities of the day, grew into greater favour with them than the plentiful stocks of linen and under-garments which once were the pride of their mothers and grandmothers. The shackles of distinctive class costume were gradually shaken off. Young girls now dress after the fashion-prints, instead of in accordance with family tradition. Liberty and

Equality have decided that among the Rights of Democratic Woman, is the right to wear befethered and beflowered high-crowned hats instead of snow-white caps.

For general expenses, and in the rough, we may take it that a franc, approximately tenpence, does the duty of a shilling; and, as twenty-five francs go to a sovereign at par, with the exchange almost always a trifle in favour of the sovereign, the advantage is clearly discernible. It is a multiplication of loaves and fishes produced by the conversion of a sovereign into francs.

French accounts are kept in francs and centimes—the only legal reckoning. One hundred centimes make a franc, or tenpence. Consequently, ten centimes make a penny, five a halfpenny or "sou," in popular parlance, but authoritatively, a five-centime piece. The price of articles in shops may not be ticketed in sous, but in centimes, by which strangers are often puzzled. But fifty centimes is simply half-a-franc, or fivepence; and seventy-five centimes, fifteen sous, three-fourths of a franc, or sevenpence - halfpenny. The word "sou" is as universally current as the coin. A "petit sou" is a five-centime, a "gros sou" a ten-centime piece. A five-franc piece is frequently spoken of as "une pièce de cent sous," a hundred-sou piece.

Old-fashioned and noble persons will speak of their friends as having so many thousand "livres" of income. Those livres are not pounds, but francs. In country markets, farmers will make bargains in "écus" (crowns)—three francs, and "pistoles"—ten francs; but no corresponding coins exist.

The octroi laws cause a sensible inequality in the expense of living in France. As we have nothing of the kind in England, where it would not be tolerated, I may be permitted to explain that the octroi is a tax levied on provisions, drinks, combustibles, and sundry other articles, as they enter towns. Call it town-dues, or city toll. The heaviness of the tax in each town depends upon the number of its population. For instance, on a barrel of wine yielding three hundred bottles, in one small town, an octroi of less than three francs is paid; in another, seven miles off, the octroi amounts to about forty. Some small towns are altogether excused from octroi, in recompense for bearing other burdens, such as having to lodge soldiers on their way to and from garrison towns. The circle around a town within which octroi

is payable, is strictly defined by posts on the roads entering it; so that while one house within the limit has to pay octroi, another, a few yards off, outside the limit, and considered to be in the country, pays nothing.

The articles liable to octroi duty depend on the will of the municipal authorities. They vary considerably in different towns. The list of such articles in two towns is hardly ever quite identical. At each entrance to a town an Octroi Bureau is posted. On driving into town from the country, an octroi man asks if you have anything to declare, and has the right to search your carriage if he thinks fit.

Defrauding the octroi by smuggling in provisions or liquors, is a heinous sin, punished, when discovered, by a "procès-verbal," or report—a vexatious form of imposing a fine. Of course, all this is sometimes an annoyance; but as it is the law, it must be submitted to.

Good stories, too numerous to recapitulate here, are current of the ingenious ways in which the octroi has been done. In Belgium the octroi has been abolished, and now and then there is talk of doing so in France. The great difficulty lies in how to provide for the immense army of employés who would be turned adrift to seek a very easy employment elsewhere; and also in the loss to the powers that be of so large a number of manageable voters.

Rents of houses, and of complete suites of apartments, or flats, are high in large towns, especially in those whose area is circumscribed by fortifications, and whose limitation of space increases its value. In such towns, many army, navy, and other government officers are obliged to take up their residence. Their permanent demand for lodgings naturally keeps up the price. When they depart, they are immediately succeeded by others. In small country towns and villages, rents are moderate—the amount, of course, depending on size, situation, and other favourable or unfavourable details. In the country, too, whole houses are obtainable rather than sets of apartments, which is more in accordance with English habits.

But there are fewer houses to let even in the country than might be supposed, because everybody, high and low, makes every effort to possess a house of his own, and to be independent of the freaks and of the tyranny of landlords. A cottage, not too big for one family, if inherited by two

sons, will be divided and made to hold two families. Of landlords, the most insupportable are some, happily not all, female "propriétaires," otherwise landladies. Like Norval's father, their constant care is to increase their store. They raise their rents or refuse repairs at the first opportunity; and they sometimes burn their fingers by so doing. For months and perhaps years, when they pass their property, they are liable to behold the notice "*Maison à louer*"—House to let—persistently adhering to its empty walls.

To avoid these annoyances, persons who are certain to reside for a lengthened period in the same locality, often prefer buying to renting a house, being sure to sell it when they depart at no great loss, perhaps at a profit, if times are good. Leases are usually granted for terms of three, six, or nine years, with power to either party to cancel the lease at the end of each term, by giving a year's written notice of the intention. Still, a nine years' lease can be taken, if agreed upon by the parties.

In purchasing fish, poultry, wild-fowl, and other game you must not be afraid to bargain. The great point is to be informed of the current prices, the actual values in the locality. "*Caveat emptor*"—buyers be on your guard! If you give the vendor,—mostly women—just what they ask, you may make them wretched for days afterwards, at the thought that they had not demanded more. Indeed, a higher price than its worth is habitually put on an article to meet an expected lower offer on the part of the purchaser. Even in shops, the notice, "*prix fixe*," implies that in other shops the prices are not always fixed.

Tea, of whatever quality, is dear. Good coffee, the national beverage, either black or with milk, is two shillings and three-pence the pound. Sugar, lump or powder, sixpence-halfpenny. Eggs are sold at market by the "quarteron"—twenty-six, the quarter of one hundred and four; their price with us on the day of writing this, January twentieth, is fifty sous, or two francs fifty centimes, or two shillings the "quarteron," which is a small fraction less than a penny an egg. In summer, it varies from twenty-six to thirty sous the "quarteron," or to a trifle more than a halfpenny an egg.

In the interior eggs are cheaper, and would be more so, but for the enormous number exported to London, collected by "cocassiers," or wholesale poultry dealers. But contrast these with London prices; and, moreover, the eggs are fresh. Blue

ducks' eggs, and brownish hens' eggs, are preferred for exports to the English market. More on this subject is found in "Our Poultry Supply," Vol. XXVIII, p. 274, of "All the Year Round."

Poultry, killed and plucked, the last operation but imperfectly performed, is sold only in large town markets or in poulters' shops. In country markets, fowls, ducks, geese, and turkeys are sold alive in couples; and this is the cheapest way of purchasing them, especially if you have a small, enclosed, sunny corner, where you can feed and fatten them for a week or two.

With the small, half-wild call-ducks of the marsh—very pretty creatures, and very good eating—you must take the precaution of clipping one of their wings. If not, they will suddenly rise in the air, and fly off to their birthplace, like so many pigeons.

Good beef, veal, and pork are now about a franc the pound; mutton a trifle dearer. All these meats ought to be cheaper, owing to agricultural distress and last summer's drought, but the butchers, between them, manage to keep up the prices, and to feather their nests.

The French pound is so much heavier than the English as to make a considerable difference when a large joint has to be purchased, and a family to be provided for. The standard weight for selling dry goods is the kilogramme, abbreviated to kilo, one thousand grammes equal to two pounds and one-fifth avoirdupois. A pound weight, "une livre"—feminine; while "un livre," a book, is masculine—is a demi-kilo, five hundred grammes. The visitor, therefore, seeing articles marked so much the half-kilo, will understand that it is only another expression for a French pound weight.

Wages in towns are rather high. Servants are hired and paid by the month, not by the quarter; which does not prevent their remaining with you if it suits them. When fault has to be found, you may make a few gentle observations; but French servants do not like being scolded, which will sometimes send them off in a tiff.

For a man-servant of all work, you will do well to take a young one who has just finished his term of service in the army. Perhaps, during his military career, he may have had to eat "un peu de vache enragée," a few meals off mad cow, in other words, to have undergone hardship; which

will make him all the more glad to light on his legs in a comfortable place. If he has been orderly to one of his officers, and if the said officer was married, so much the better. In that case, besides learning obedience and punctuality, he will be able and ready to sweep out the rooms, make the beds, cook a plain dinner, wait at table, and take care of the baby, besides performing sundry other indoor and outdoor duties.

In the country, you may meet with a hale young lass who will turn her hand to any rural employment. She is not exactly the London upper housemaid, where two or three are kept. She will not raise discussions based on "it isn't my place" to do this or that; but she will milk the cow, feed the pig, kill and pluck the poultry, dig in the garden, and even harness the horses in case of need. Of course, her ways will be a little rough, and her conversation interspersed with flowers of patois; but she will bear teaching, if kindly taught, and will stay with you, perhaps for years, if she takes a liking to you, and finds it her interest to stay. Or perhaps, after you have improved her mind and polished her manners, she will migrate to the nearest large town, to better herself, rejoin her old sweetheart, or look out for a new one. Still, French countrywomen are warmly attached to a home when once they have kindly taken to it.

HUSH !

HUSH ! for the red leaves are drifting.
Strive not to sweep them away;
Stir not the air by complaining—
A sweet hope lies dying to-day.

Hush ! while the clouds on the hill-side
Are gathering sullen and grey.
Ask not for vanishing sunlight—
A great trust lies dying to-day.

Hush ! while the low winds are moaning,
Like a sigh from a heart we betray.
Strive not to read what they tell us—
A first love lies dying to-day.

Hush ! Fate and Nature are comrades.
They rule: what avails it to say
That hope, trust, and love made our life sweet,
Since all are laid dying to-day ?

THE LAST OF HIS RACE.

LOUIS GILBERT was a new comer to the little mountain village of Cornil. No one knew anything of him beyond his name; that he was a well-looking man of about thirty; of quick, business-like ways; and that he had bought a meadow by the river from Phillipou, the landlord of the

"*Repos des Voyageurs*," where he was building a red-brick factory with a tall chimney, remarkable as the only erection of its kind to be seen in that wild narrow valley through which the brown river rushes to join the more peaceable Garonne.

No such startling event as the building of the Usine Gilbert had happened in Cornil since the days of the great French Revolution, when the splendid feudal castle of the Marquis de Cornil had been battered into the picturesque ruin which now crowns the steepest point of the wooded ridge.

But, whereas the destruction of the château had faded into the dreamland of a far gone past, of which only old Babette Gannat cared to remember the story, the factory was an event of to-day, and so closely connected with increase of work and wages that every one in the village—excepting, perhaps, Mother Babette—was most keenly interested therein.

Babette was, no doubt, too old and too blind to trouble herself about new things, or to be drawn into the vortex of new excitements. She was getting almost too feeble for her daily pilgrimage from her cottage at the upper end of the village to the walnut tree which grew beside the square tower of the ruin. Almost too feeble, yet she was mostly to be seen there, with her great-granddaughter, Jacqueline, a goat, and a couple of sheep; so that if a stranger came to see the ruins, she might earn a few sous by telling the story of the burning of the castle and of the terrible doom of the de Beaugencys, who had held high state there.

While they waited for these rare visitors, the old woman sat and dozed, and Jacqueline, watching the animals, wove a good deal of maidenly perplexity into the threads she spun from her distaff.

So they sat one bright April noon, when Jacqueline, as she twisted her wool, and the animals, as they cropped the young, juicy grass, became aware of a footstep ascending the path which led towards them. The goat gave an inquisitive sniff, the two sheep raised their black noses and made a few timorous steps at random, while Jacqueline's pretty forehead contracted into a frown, and she muttered: "Justin Phillipou again! Has he no sense!" Only old Babette made no sign, because she had heard nothing.

The next moment Jacqueline's frown vanished with a sigh of relief, the sheep scampered wildly round an angle of the

wall, and the old woman roused herself with a gesture of enquiry, as Monsieur Louis Gilbert appeared on the shady side of the ruin.

"Bonjour, mesdames," he said courteously. "It is very pleasant here in the shade."

"It is the monsieur from Paris," whispered Jacqueline to her grandmother.

"Who? What?" queried Babette in return, moving her sightless face to and fro.

"The monsieur who has employed Cousin Pierre to do his carting; he who has bought Phillipou's meadow."

"I am Louis Gilbert, madame," explained the new comer. "You may have heard that I am building the factory down below."

"Ah! you are a stranger, and you have come to see the ruins and to hear the story of the burning of the château," replied the old woman. "All the strangers come to ask about it; but I am getting very old, and I grow tired with talking."

"Then pray don't exert yourself on my behalf. I have known the story you speak of all my life, or at least as long as I can remember."

"Then, it is not true that you are a stranger in Cornil, monsieur, as they all think," said Jacqueline, raising a pair of soft, grey eyes to Gilbert's face.

"The destruction of this castle, and of many another," he replied, giving no direct answer to her question, "is a matter of history; I can easily fill in the details from a hundred similar tales. It has no special features, I expect."

"A hundred similar stories," cried Babette. "Ah! that shows you know nothing about it. Nay, there is no story like it. Those who saw it all have told me that there was never anything like the grandeur and pride to be seen in the castle of the de Beaugencys, nor in all the length and breadth of the land was there wickedness and cruelty like that of our seigneurs; from Limoges to Bordeaux they were the wickedest and the worst. At last one they had wronged—it was my grandfather—rose from his death-bed with more than human strength, and dragged himself to the castle courtyard, where the Marquis and his boon companions were playing a 'jeu de paume,' and there he raised his dying hand and his feeble voice, and told the story of his wrongs—those wrongs which would not let him die in peace till he had called down the vengeance of Heaven on the Lords of

Cornil. His words went up to the ear of Heaven, pleading that the evil-doers might be cut off root and branch from the earth till their very name was forgotten. That was a whole generation before the Revolution ; but men still remembered those last words of Paul Gannat when the day of reckoning came. It was my father who led the villagers to the assault, and he stood by the guillotine at Tulle, when the last of the hated race had been tracked to his hiding-place and brought back to die. Nay, monsieur, you are wrong to say there are many such stories. It was my grandfather's prophecy working itself out."

"A good many prophecies worked themselves out just then," rejoined Gilbert, who had listened with interest, "at least to the satisfaction of those who desired their fulfilment. But why do you suppose that, because certain of—of the De Beaugencys were guillotined, the family is exterminated ?"

"I suppose nothing," replied Babette petulantly. "I tell the tale as it was told to me by those who saw what they told ; they said that in all the broad land no one was left to call himself by the hated name."

An odd smile crossed Gilbert's lips. "I am afraid you will have to alter the end of your interesting story, whenever you tell it in the future ; for the fact is that I know—pretty intimately—a man who claims direct descent from the Marquises de Cornil, and who hopes some day to be in a position to buy back the laud which once belonged to his family."

"He never will ! he never will !" cried the old woman, with wonderful energy. "he is a fool to hope it. If you are his friend tell him that the force of the curse is not spent so long as a de Beaugency treads the earth. So soon as he attempts to win back what the villainy of his forefathers forfeited, so soon will the hand of the chosen minister of vengeance fall on him."

"I will tell him what you say," said Gilbert, humouring her mood ; "but I know he is not the man to listen to such a warning. However, forewarned is forearmed, and if you could add one more detail to your disclosure, and send him the name of the chosen minister of vengeance, he might avert his danger by timely precautions."

"I cannot tell the name," she replied slowly ; "and he cannot avert the danger. The doom must be fulfilled."

"Very tragical for my friend." And Monsieur Gilbert gave his head an incredulous shake. "And did you say, mademoiselle," he went on, turning to Jacqueline, "that my carter was your cousin ?"

"Our fathers are cousins," answered Jacqueline blushing—a bright blush, which spread from her forehead to her throat.

"Ah, indeed !" continued Gilbert, in reply to the treacherous sign ; "that's how it is, is it ? Then we will make an exchange of warnings ; you have given me one—for my friend ; I, on my part, would recommend you, if you have any influence with this cousin, or interest in him, to give him a caution, which will perhaps come better from your lips than from mine. He is a good deal too prone to keep important business of mine waiting for the very insignificant purpose of refreshing himself too freely at any cabaret he may chance to pass as he drives along the way. If this continues, it may possibly lead to our parting company, which would doubtless be more troublesome to him than the exercise of a little more abstinence."

So saying, he lifted his hat again, thanked the old woman for her story, and went on his way before the blush had died out of Jacqueline's cheek.

"It is hard to hide a secret from eyes that have learnt to look beyond the grave," said Babette, when they were alone again.

"I have made no secret about Pierre," retorted the girl, flushing angrily.

"Who spoke of Pierre ?" asked her grandmother. "It was of the olden time, and of the lords of the castle, we were speaking."

And then the customary silence settled on the group.

"Gilbert hasn't let the grass grow under his feet, has he ? It's four months to-day since they began levelling and digging in my meadow, and now the factory is in full work. There ain't many men would have managed that in the time. No. Gilbert's a rare fellow to make things march."

It was Phillipou senior who issued this dictum to the villagers assembled in the bar-parlour of the "Repos des Voyageurs."

"Yes, and now the factory is working," said Martin, the sabottier, "will anyone tell me what it's working at, and what is the meaning of all the chestnut-wood that Gilbert is buying far and near in the mountain ?"

"Yes!" chorused two or three others. "Why hasn't he set up a signboard to say what he's making? Come, Pierre Gannat, you ought to know something about it, you've been on the work from the beginning. What is the trade of this spry monsieur from Paris, and why does he make a secret of it?"

It was evening, and as Pierre's day's work was over, he had full right to be sitting as he was—stretched at ease on the most comfortable corner of the settle.

"How should I know more than another?" he returned grumpily. "All I know about Gilbert's business is that I have to cart wood for him and unload it. Seven times since Monday have I been over the mountain to Juillac; seven times have I loaded and unloaded as big a cart-load of wood as the beasts could drag. A man has not much time for prying into other people's business when he's kept hard at it like that."

"It's a little bit queer, ain't it?" resumed Phillipou père, "just to think he has thirty to forty men employed—men of the village, like Pierre, and men from Tulle—and not one of them knows what the work is nor what it is for. I've asked nearly all on 'em, and it isn't that they shut their mouths on what they know; it's plain they know nothing. They tell me there's sawing of wood and grinding through engines, and then comes a juice—a liquid, enfin, what you please to call it; then there's a boiling, and a cooking, and a cooling, and straining, and a running off into casks, and then they load it up on trucks, a dozen or more great tonneaux at a time, and send it off to the Gare d'Ivry, at Paris; but what it's good for, and who makes use of it, no one knows but Gilbert. There never was such a business done in these parts. I don't say it for myself; but some men might be vexed to have sold land to a man who can't or won't be open with his neighbours. I like Gilbert myself; he eats his dinner here regular and pays the same; but I should like to be told more about him."

"And why," suggested someone, "don't you ask him yourself, if he eats here every day?"

"I don't say but what I have," replied the innkeeper; "but I got nothing if I did. He's a shrewd one. I like the man; but he's mortal close."

"Well, I've got nothing against him, or his ways," said Auger, the baker. "He's put a livelihood in the way of more than

one, and he's bettered the sale of wood. Why, since he set up there's no need to take it all the way to Brive, and to stand haggling on the Place de l'Hospice till all's blue. My François said he shouldn't wonder if Gilbert's stuff isn't something to do with dyeing, because it colours their hands so. However, what does it matter what they make, so long as they earn good wages?"

"Good wages, indeed!" growled Pierre Gannat; "what's eighteen francs a week to such as me, when he's making a mint of money at our expense. He's come here because he wants wood, and he can get it, plenty and cheap, and he's set up his machinery where he hopes to keep it secret from them as knows as much as he does about his trade. If I had wood to sell I wouldn't let him have it at the price some fools have sold theirs. Gilbert shouldn't grow rich by me."

"Ah, you're set against him," said Phillipou loftily, "because he didn't buy your father's field instead of ours."

"That I'm not!" cried Pierre. "We'd rather keep the land we've had so long than sell it to such as him. What I say is, why—if there's money to be made out of chestnut wood—should Gilbert come and make it? Why shouldn't we use our own wood and make our own fortunes?"

"Gilbert would have to teach you a pretty lot more than your thick head would take in before you'd do that, Pierre Gannat," said Justin Phillipou with a sneer.

"Moreover," said the baker, who respected the mysteries of a trade, "you can't expect a man to tell his secrets. Gilbert has a secret. Let him keep it. We're none the poorer thereby."

"And as to you, Pierre Gannat," said Jacqueline's father, "you couldn't make a fortune nowhow, you're too lazy. Hark to what you said about a tramp to Juillac. What's that to a man when he's hale and strong?"

"Oh, yes," cried Pierre, rounding sharply on the new speaker. "You've always got a word against me, ever since you saw how it was with Jacqueline."

"I speak of you as everyone else does, and if you think that a steady girl like Jacqueline would marry a vaurien——"

"She'd marry me to-morrow," interrupted Pierre stoutly, "if you would let her choose." Here Justin Phillipou shrugged his shoulders. "I'm as good as any other man, if I'm not well off. Why don't you let the girl choose for herself?"

"Nobody's interfered with the lass as far as I've ever seen," said old Phillipou.

"There's none so blind as those that won't see," retorted Pierre; "but perhaps you'll have your eyes opened for you yet. It's a long lane that hasn't a turn in it, and when Jacqueline's banns are cried, who knows what name will be put up along with hers?"

"Well, well," interposed the elder Gannat, "it ain't much use talking that over which has been settled already and elsewhere. It's just as likely that you'll find out Gilbert's secret, and build another factory by the river, and make him play second fiddle, as that you'll have anything to do with the crying of Jacqueline's banns."

"Why don't you marry the girl at once, then, and have the question settled?" (at the general assembly of the villagers, family affairs were very freely discussed), asked Gannat's next neighbour, in an undertone.

"She's over young yet," replied Gannat, "and she looks after her grandmother's mother, which the old lady won't want much longer. So Justin will have to wait, and Pierre will have to learn to take his disappointment without grumbling."

Monsieur Gilbert fully justified old Phillipou's description of him. He was a close man, and a busy one. This, he was thoroughly assured, was the only way to succeed in business. His discovery of a valuable dye which could be manufactured at a comparatively small cost in a rural district like Cornil, was not making his fortune with such fabulous rapidity as Pierre Gannat imagined, but he intended that it should enrich him before he was an old man. To make his fortune was but the first step in the career he had planned. Beyond this initial process lay a long vista, in which the enterprising, practical chemist, Louis Gilbert, should be a person of the past, the mere chrysalis from which had emerged Louis Gilbert de Beaugency, while the owner of the red-brick factory should have become the purchaser and restorer of his ruined ancestral home. The ground-plan of the castle in the air was mapped out in Gilbert's mind with characteristic precision, and, with its definite measurements and well-calculated difficulties, would have formed a fine contrast to the wild day-dream which burnt so fiercely in Pierre Gannat's brain, making him more reckless, more feverish, and more intemperate every day that he dreamt it.

No one who met the homely figure of Gilbert's carter, in his broad felt hat, his linen blouse, and his roomy breeches, trudging along the mountain roads in front of his oxen, would have suspected that he was the victim of disappointed affection. Under the broad hat was apparent nothing more romantic than a look of brooding ill-temper, and when his patient beasts stumbled, or otherwise failed in their duty, he gave vent to his feelings in language that augured ill for any woman who might be unhappy enough to call him lord and master.

But, unromantic as he looked, and small as was the sympathy which his outward semblance was capable of awakening, he was truly unhappy, and Jacqueline was seldom absent altogether from his thoughts. How could he forget her when he knew, from her own sweet lips, that whatever pretences her parents chose to make, and to whatever of these pretences she was obliged tacitly to submit, there was not, and never would be, any of her love to spare for Justin Phillipou.

Pierre knew that he was her one and only love; but all her parents heeded was that Paillipou was well-to-do, and that Justin's wife would be a person of importance in Cornil, while he, Pierre—luckless wight!—had learned no trade, but was obliged to earn miserable wages by drudging, in heat and cold, in rain and shine, over rough and smooth, for a man who was come thither to profit by such ignorance as his.

These thoughts concerning Jacqueline always led him thus to one haunting idea—why, if a man might grow rich by making a preparation from chestnut-wood, should this Parisian keep the secret all to himself?

The wood had grown on the mountain long before Gilbert came; he could not make his wealth without the aid of the men of Cornil, and Pierre easily persuaded himself that the chemist had no right to hide his secret, but ought to share it freely with those by whom he profited. There ought to be an equal chance for all to benefit by the natural resources of the country, and he was fully convinced that he and his fellow villagers were suffering a shameful injustice at the hands of this shrewd, taciturn interloper. Such bitter reflections as these required much drowning on his daily rounds, especially as he nursed them in silence—since no one else had the insight or courage necessary to sympathise with him.

And so it happened that one winter evening after nightfall, Pierre, who had been thinking and drinking a good deal during the day, was, consequently, sadly belated; and that Gilbert, on his way to dine at the "Repos des Voyageurs," was aware of the sound of wheels, and of a familiar surly voice in the darkness.

"That's you, Gannat, at last, is it?" he called out in a tone of sharp displeasure.

"And that's you, Gilbert, is it, too?" returned the other, evidently in no mood for contrition.

"Ah! it's clear enough what has kept you," said Gilbert angrily. "You've been drinking again."

"And if I have been drinking, mayn't a man be thirsty when he's tramped from Cornil to Aubazine, and from Aubazine to Lantreuil, and then back?"

"You are an insolent fellow, and I'm completely sick of the inconvenience you cause me."

"So am I sick of many things; and you had better get someone who will do more of your slavery for three francs a day."

"That's exactly what I mean to do. You can go down to the usine, unload that wood, which ought to have been in the mill at four this afternoon; take away all that belongs to you; and come to me to settle your wages to-morrow morning."

Pierre's answer to this was an unnecessarily sharp thrust to his oxen, and an oath as he proceeded on his way, while Gilbert went into the inn and sat down to dinner. He had been hungry a quarter of an hour before; but the dismissal of his carter, which would cause him some inconvenience, preoccupied him, and the man's vindictive insolence had annoyed him. After a hasty meal, he got up and walked down towards the factory. If Gannat had to be paid off he might as well do it forthwith, he said to himself, and so be free from the interruption in the morning.

Meanwhile, Gannat had driven his waggon into the yard in a frame of mind that told terribly on the hides of his beasts. He gave Causse, the watchman, a surly call as he passed the little watch-house by the gate.

"Hand out your lantern," he cried; "I'm going to do my last bit of work for Gilbert, and I'm in a hurry to get my supper."

Causse made haste to be obliging, his smoking soup was on the table, and he was also busy over the sale of a donkey. He gave no particular heed to Pierre's

announcement that he had received his congé.

As the cart rumbled across the yard, a sudden thought struck Gannat. He went back to the watchman.

"I want the key of the atelier," he said; "there's a blouse of mine in there."

"Can't it stop there till to-morrow?"

"No, it can't. But you needn't trouble to leave your soup; I can get it myself."

So Causse took down the key from its nail, and returned to his seat by the fire.

The atelier was at the further side of the yard, and out of it opened the room which Gilbert used as an office and laboratory. Gannat wondered why it had never occurred to him before that in that room must be some key to the mystery of the factory. He had been in the room often; he knew the exact position of everything—of the cases of chemicals, of the table, with its scales and retorts, of the bureau, and the piles of papers. The wine he had drunk and his encounter with his employer had irritated and excited him. The opportunity looked dazzlingly favourable. Causse would not notice how long he was in the yard, and in half an hour he could easily search a room so small as the office. In his elation he did not pause for a moment over two things which would have deterred him in a cooler moment—firstly, what he should look for; and, secondly, when he had perchance discovered the object of his search, whether he should be able to make head or tail of it.

The door leading from the atelier to the office was locked; but there were plenty of tools to be found, and there was no time to hesitate before trifles, such as a couple of bolts. In a few moments he stood in his employer's sanctum, and looked round it by the feeble light of the lantern.

It was all very confusing. There stood the chemicals, labelled with curious combinations of letters, reminding him of no words which came within the narrow horizon of his education. Here hung files of papers, here lay other papers covered in handwriting which would take him hours to decipher. He cursed Gilbert aloud for having made his bold attempt so difficult in effect. He rummaged hopelessly for a few moments, then growing desperate, he resolved to carry the whole mass of papers away. They would require long to investigate, unless, perhaps, he was very lucky. But long or short he would find the secret

out—that was his fixed determination. He would become as rich, not as Gilbert, but as Phillipou ; and, then, Jacqueline . . . It was an engrossing thought, it encouraged him as he huddled the papers, letters, bills, receipts, just as they lay, into a huge bundle, feeling like a man who is measuring his strength against the strength of destiny. It was no wonder he did not hear the sound of footsteps crossing the atelier. He only knew that he was no longer alone, when a hand was laid on his collar, and Gilbert's voice close to his ear, said :

" You blackguard ! What do you mean by rifling my desk ? "

For a moment Gannat's mind refused to grapple with the thought that he was interrupted, detected, ruined, disgraced for ever. His first complete idea was of Jacqueline. Jacqueline married to Phillipou, while he, her own love, was in prison. He burst into a wild laugh, and then a bitter fury seized him, a fury of all the envy, hatred, and malice that he had been nursing up so long. He threw himself on Gilbert with a suddenness for which the other was totally unprepared.

" If there isn't chestnut-wood enough for both of us, you sha'n't have your share either," he cried, as he twined his hard, muscular hands round Gilbert's throat.

It gave him a fierce, wild sense of pleasure to feel his victim writhe and struggle vainly for a few moments, and then sink inert and disfigured from the relaxed grip of his fingers.

" Dieu du ciel, Pierre," cried the watchman as Gilbert's body fell at the feet of his assailant. " You have killed him." And he looked, bewildered, from the fierce pallor of the face opposite him to the blackened, swollen features on the floor. " I must do what I can for him, I suppose," he said, bending down over Gilbert's form, nor did he look up until he knew that the murderer had left him alone with the dead; it was not his business to arrest an old comrade, the agent de police might do his own work.

But when the hue-and-cry was raised, and when the country was searched high and low, the watchman's negligence was severely censured, for no trace was found of Pierre Gannat; he had disappeared as completely as the secret of Gilbert's wonderful dye had disappeared on the death of its discoverer. It, too, was sought for long among the papers which Pierre had tried to carry off; but the most careful investigation

by qualified persons made out nothing at all.

If, however, the chemist's secret died with him, the curiosity of the villagers was more than satisfied by the facts relating to him, which transpired during the investigation of the murder, and the winding up of the affairs of the factory. These facts stand recorded and summarised on a cross, in the little cemetery, which tells that below it rests Louis Gilbert de Beaugency, the last claimant to the title of Marquis de Cornil, who had come back to the home of his forefathers to win back a lost inheritance.

For a little while longer old Babette used to sit on the sunny side of the ruins, crooning over the story of the old curse and its fulfilment.

" It was to be," she used to say. " It was to be. He was warned. It is Pierre that should be pitied, not the man who called himself Gilbert."

But Jacqueline was more to be pitied still, because, from day to day, she lives, half in hope, and half in dread, of some sign or word from the man she has loved always and will love to the last.

RED TOWERS.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Gerald," "Alexia," etc., etc.

PART I.

CHAPTER XIII. A SPOILT CHILD.

" THAT evening—that was the last happy evening of my life," said Antoinette, long after to somebody who was very fond of her.

" Don't say that, dear," said her friend. " I mean—till now," she said, and no one could be dissatisfied with the answer.

In those days no child of ten could be more thoroughly childish than she, though even then she had her full share of womanly good sense. And in after days, in hours that would have tried some natures sorely, she did not lose much of her child-likeness, or of her good sense; but then the possibilities of the future had not even occurred to her; when she left her reverend Mother that day, and came to La Tour Blanche with her father, it was all to her "the wild freshness of morning." Her father, Suzanne, and her old home; what more was wanted to make life perfect ? That was, indeed, a happy evening, and

for a finishing touch, just at sunset, beautiful gleams of yellow light darted out from under the thick curtain of grey clouds, and laid soft shadows all about the old precincts of the château, and gave a topaz shine to the west windows of the tower. Mademoiselle Antoinette could have believed that they were lighted up from inside, as she saw them from the plantation below. Suzanne did not like her to say that, and crossed herself at the notion.

There was really a great deal to do that evening. She must just poke her head into every room in the house, however dark, damp, or unfurnished, to see whether there were any alterations; and she must go into the kitchen, where there were really a row of new copper pans, and some very nice bunches of herbs hanging up to dry, and a smiling young cook, imported from Saint Bernard for the occasion, and two or three old friends in sabots and blue gowns and cotton caps looking in with rugged old brown faces to see Mademoiselle. Then out at the back, where the grass grew long and wild in the old "plaisance," there were chickens and geese to be visited; and away along a shady walk there was Antoinette's own garden, which wanted so much digging and arranging that it must be put off till to-morrow. Then it was most necessary to inspect the chapel, which Suzanne had already decorated for mass to-morrow morning. In fact, all the young "châtelaine's" work was hardly done when it was time to brush her curls for dinner, and tie them round with a blue ribbon, and array her small person in a large white pinafore. Then she danced downstairs into the salon, sparkling with life and beauty and fun, to join her father, who had been inspecting on his own account; and together they went into the brown polished dining-room, where the little cook from Saint Bernard sent them in a dinner worthy of Paris, and old Pierre waited on them, very much to his own satisfaction. If Antoinette had not been quite so happy herself, she might have noticed that her father was a little silent; but that evening nothing troubled her. Suzanne had something serious to say to Pierre in the pantry, when she was helping him to put the things away after dinner.

"My friend," said she, "I was down in the new wood with Mademoiselle this evening, and the windows of the apartment of Madame la Marquise were illuminated."

"What are you talking about?" said Pierre, contemptuously.

"You laugh, and you tell me it is the sun, no doubt; men like you always do. The child said they looked as if they were lighted from inside, and so they did. And you won't pretend to forget when they were lighted up inside, and you and I saw them from the end of the avenue, when we had run down to look at the triumphal arch. And we had only just time to get back, to receive our young mistress, and all her windows were lighted up to welcome her. Fifteen years ago, Master Pierre. We were younger then than we are now, and I had not committed the foolishness of marrying you."

"Bah! what does the woman mean!" Pierre tried to keep up his scornful airs, but failed a little before the solemn sincerity of his wife's eyes. "Well, well," he said, "I suppose you take it for a sign, do you, that Monsieur le Marquis is going to be married again."

"Ciel! Don't talk so loud."

"I'm whispering. Well—and if he is?"

"Mon Dieu! you don't think it likely, do you?"

"Stranger things might happen," said Pierre, with the air of an oracle. "I may tell you, I needed no illumination to put it into my head. He has been walking all over the place, and finding fault with things he never noticed before. Pommard told me so. He is either going to marry or to sell the place."

"Sell it! Impossible!"

"Va!" said Pierre. "Has that woman made the coffee?"

Under the great chimney of the salon a fire of logs was flaming; in the uncertain light of this and of one dim lamp, the bare old room looked its best. The Marquis and his little daughter sat opposite to each other in two high arm-chairs beside the fire; here and there above their heads a point of colour or tarnished gilding shone out from the tall emblazoned chimney-piece. All the ceiling was crossed by dark painted beams; the walls also were painted and hung with a few dismal old pictures; and by this light one did not see the yawning cracks and blisters in the faded paint, or the great damp stains on the wall.

M. de Montmirail was trying to read the "Gaulois" by the combined light of fire and lamp, which shone very becomingly on his handsome fair head,

but was hardly satisfactory in the matter of reading.

Antoinette sat smiling and looking about her. The chair was much too high for her, and her little feet were cocked up on a footstool; she looked at them, then at the fire, then round the room, and then settled down into a prolonged gaze at her father, who presently threw the paper aside with an impatient exclamation.

"Pierre might have done something better for us in the way of light," he said.

"Never mind, papa: talk to me," said Antoinette.

"What do you want to talk about, chatterbox? You look very dignified in that large chair. Madame de Cernay will be quite impressed, if you sit up like that to entertain her to-morrow."

"I don't think I care for Madame de Cernay. Not passionately at least."

"Not passionately," he repeated, smiling. "Who cares passionately for anybody or anything? Not you or I. You need not use such strong words, 'petite'."

"Pardon!" said Antoinette, quickly. "I care passionately for this place, and for you, and for living here with you. The word is not too strong for me. To me it is 'ravissant, ravissant' to the very utmost height, to sit here in this chair and see you in that one. It is all in life that is most exquisite."

"Merci, petite," he said smiling, and very gently; but there was some shadow of trouble in his eyes.

"Yes, an evening like this is all right, it is perfection, it is what ought always to be," the girl went on. "Do you know, papa, once upon a time I had a great fear."

"What was it?" he asked, looking up quickly.

"Don't be frightened, dearest," she said. "It is long ago now. It was when you were staying in England with our cousins. You said in your letters that you liked England so much, and all the people there. I was afraid that you would wish to live in England; and I told grandmamma, and she was a little afraid too. But she said England was really so terrible that she could not believe it; only, to be sure, she thought that you had little eccentric fancies sometimes, dear papa."

"It is a charming country, and I met charming people there," said the Marquis. "I should like to take you there some day for a visit. You can talk English a little,

and Lady Lefroy would be very kind to you. But as to living there; no, one is best in one's own country."

"Do you remember the little Englishman whose name was Romaine, who spent Sunday with you on a hill?"

The Marquis laughed. "Of course I remember him. He was a very nice fellow. But why do you call him 'little'?" He was nearly as tall as I am."

"Is it possible? Grandmamma and I made a picture of you walking side by side, and he was very much the smaller."

"You never showed me that work of art, or I could have corrected you."

"It was not worth while. Will you ask that Englishman to stay with you, when the house is restored, and we are living here together?"

"Why? Do you want to see him?"

"Of course I want to see him. I want to like everybody you like. And I think we agree very well, for I know you like M. de Cernay better than Madame, just as I do. And I can never go to England, because of that dreadful sea. Oh, I should die of fear!"

"Let us hope that some day you will find a little courage," said M. de Montmirail.

He was certainly unlike himself that evening, a little disturbed from his usual frank placidity. His talk with Antoinette had lost something of its old intimate charm; the touch of perfect sympathy and mutual understanding was somehow absent, though she was not aware of it: she idolised him far too thoroughly to be critical.

He presently got up, and walked along the room two or three times, from the door into the hall, to the door into the dining-room. Antoinette watched him silently for a minute or two, and then sprang from her chair and joined him.

"Why do you march up and down?" she said, "and what are you thinking about? I must march with you, and you must tell me."

Achille smiled, and took one more turn with the small hand in his arm. He could not tell her of what he was thinking; no, not that evening: every word the child said made it harder.

"Come, let us play a game of tric-trac," he said. "And then, Mademoiselle, you must go to bed. What will your grandmother say if you don't have your proper sleep at La Tour Blanche? And she will find it out at the first glance. As for me, I shall never hear the end of it."

It was the custom at La Tour Blanche for the Curé of the village to celebrate mass, once a year, in the chapel at the château ; the day was a day in November, the anniversary of the last Marquis's death. It was, therefore, with this service for the repose of her grandfather's soul that little Antoinette de Montmirail began the next day.

Her father made a point of being there every year, and she had often been with him, but never, she thought, had the solemnity of the service been so real to her as on that morning. Her father was always a good man, and a good Catholic ; perhaps it was because she was older, and more able to understand things, but she felt that day, as she knelt beside him, as if his devotion were deeper than she had ever known it before. It was, indeed, happiness to kneel beside him, even at such a sad service as this ; to feel that she belonged to him just as he belonged to the dear grandfather who was dead.

People who were at all particular in religion might have been distressed by the rough, inharmonious tones of the good Curé's voice, which suited ill with his vestments of black velvet and silver lace. The blue blouse and corduroy trousers of his acolyte were also a little out of keeping ; but neither M. de Montmirail, his daughter, nor the servants who knelt behind them in the little, vaulted chapel, were disposed to be at all critical on these subjects. Their religion was too much a part of their life to be the least troublesome, or anything but simple.

The mass was said, the duty was done, and that was enough for them. And all the time, a background to the Curé's chanting, a thick, dark November rain descended steadily, running in a stream down the stone steps outside, and making its way to lie in little pools under the rugged old chapel door.

When mass was over, Mademoiselle Antoinette darted across the archway and danced into the kitchen, where Suzanne made her sit down by the stove and took her wet shoes off. Several attractive pots were stewing on the stove, with a view to the breakfast of Monsieur and Mademoiselle, also of Monsieur le Curé, and of Monsieur and Madame de Cernay—if the day were not too wet for them.

In the meanwhile the Curé, who had tucked up his "soutane," and carried a large umbrella, was talking to M. de Montmirail over a comfortable blaze in the

salon. The cracked and discoloured paint, the damp with which the walls were stained, the rickety windows, the faded, heavy, ugly furniture, the absence of curtains, portières, tapestries, comfort or luxury of any kind, were all far more sadly conspicuous now than in the evening ; and Madame de Cernay, who drove up cheerfully with her husband in a small omnibus through all the rain, threw up her hands and screamed with laughter when M. de Montmirail smilingly welcomed her to his ruin.

"Ruin indeed, my dear Marquis ! " she cried. " We must take this into our calculations very carefully."

But if Madame de Cernay was uncomplimentary towards the old house, she took a very different tone with regard to Antoinette, who had grown to perfection since she last saw her. " Ma belle—mon ange," were amongst her mildest expressions ; and the child thus treated began to think that, after all, Madame de Cernay was very agreeable. No wonder that everyone thought and said so.

"At least," said Antoinette afterwards, "I liked her when she was there, praising me. But when she was gone, I did not much like to think about her."

Antoinette was all smiles, though she did not talk much in the presence of these grown-up visitors. Madame de Cernay did most of the talking at breakfast, though the Curé made manful efforts to take his share, and argued with her on every subject. She was a fine, pleasant-looking woman, tall, and large, with a pretty complexion ; altogether she and her ugly little husband were curiously matched, except in their manners, both being very demonstrative and very noisy. They and his other friends often accused Achille de Montmirail of being as quiet as an Englishman.

After breakfast the rain went on pouring in steady sheets. M. le Curé again tucked up his "soutane," and started off down the avenue with his large umbrella. M. de Montmirail and his friend went to smoke in the library, a dilapidated old room in the west tower. Before M. de Cernay left the salon, he made all sorts of telegraphic signs to his wife, who responded in the same way. Antoinette could hardly help laughing ; the dear Baron looked so very like a monkey.

Pierre came in with a fresh log for the fire, which blazed cheerfully up the wide chimney. Madame de Cernay sat in the

large arm-chair where M. de Montmirail had sat last night, put her feet on a footstool, and held up the "Gaulois" carefully for a screen, as there were no screens in this half-furnished old house.

"Now, Antoinette, entertain me, amuse me, my sweet child," she said. "Your poor little Curé proses terribly; he thinks himself as wise as Solomon. Don't sit there, my angel, you will burn your cheeks," as Antoinette sat down in front of the fire.

She could not exactly place herself in the large chair opposite to Madame la Baronne. So, after a moment's thought, Antoinette fetched another, high-backed and very uncomfortable, and placed it a little way off, where she would both show proper politeness and preserve her complexion.

"Amuse me," said Madame de Cernay again; and her eyes wandered round the room with a considering look.

"Shall I tell you about the Convent, madame?" said Antoinette. "I made papa laugh yesterday with some of my stories."

"Ah, no, no!" said Madame de Cernay. "No doubt the Convent is entrancing, and you are all very good there. When I was at the Convent I was very wicked. I could tell you stories, but I won't, so don't ask me. I don't want to hear about other people, my little angel, but about yourself. You are growing up now, and you must have a great many wishes. Tell me all about them."

Antoinette folded her arms and looked grave.

Madame de Cernay sincerely thought that it was a very sweet and pretty little face—only a shade too earnest, perhaps: the girl might be inclined to take life too seriously. That was a fault of dear Achille, in spite of all his sweet temper and easy good-nature.

It appeared that Antoinette had not many wishes. They all resolved themselves into two; that La Tour Blanche might be restored, and that she might live there with her father.

"Ah, mon Dieu! I never heard anything more excellent," cried Madame de Cernay, in high approval. "And does your dear father know of these pretty little wishes? Because I feel sure that they must charm him beyond everything."

"Oh, yes, madame. He has known for a long time, and we were talking about them again yesterday."

"Charming, charming!"

"Oh, yes, one can make the most glorious plans. Only one must be reasonable," said Antoinette with a little sigh. "Where is the money to come from? Papa is not rich enough to restore the château, and he does not think we can live here as it is—though I do. Yesterday he talked about selling it, which would break all our hearts."

"Of course it would," said the Baronne, staring at her and nodding. "No, no, he will never sell it. He will do something much pleasanter for everybody. Did he talk of any other plan?"

"He said there might be a way. I did not know what he meant. He said, perhaps he would tell me to-day."

"Ah! He thought you were old enough to keep a secret, did he? Bien, ma belle! I think so too."

"What secret, madame?" Antoinette opened her large eyes very wide, and the colour rose in her cheeks. Suddenly she knew that something was going to happen, something that would change her life—and yet, what could it be? Was it happiness or sorrow? Madame de Cernay was laughing; but she laughed at everything. At that moment something forced into Antoinette's mind the consciousness that her father had been a little mysterious yesterday and this morning; her father, who was generally as open as the day. What could be going to happen? Was he going away anywhere to make his fortune? Had he got some appointment somewhere? Would she be separated from him, perhaps for years? Had he brought her here to say good-bye to the old home, till he could come back again with money enough to restore it?

"Oh, he is going away!" she cried in shrill agony, clasping her hands together. "Oh no, let him sell it to Monsieur Chocolat. That would be better than going away. Madame, you will let me go and tell him so. He is doing it for me, and I would rather die than lose him."

"Stop! stay here, my child!" exclaimed Madame de Cernay. "You are talking like a little mad woman. Who said a word about your father's going away? He is going nowhere but to Paris, as far as I know; and he will take you with him."

Antoinette sat down again, comforted for the moment. But she watched the Baronne with a sort of nervous anxiety, and the happy child-look had vanished from her face. "I thought he was going away to get some money," she murmured.

"No, no," said Madame de Cernay, smiling. "His friends have thought of a better plan than that; and I hope his charming little daughter will be too reasonable to set herself against it. It will be as good for her as for him. She will have a happy, beautiful home, and a friend who will love her, and take her out into the world, and arrange her dress, and in fact give the dear child everything that she wants to make life perfect. She loves her father, and she will see him entirely happy with a companion who will adore him, and with a fortune to do anything he pleases to the old Tour Blanche. It will be one of these days the most beautiful house in the neighbourhood, and no doubt the most agreeable, as Mademoiselle de Montmirail grows up."

Madame de Cernay went on very agreeably with her oration thus far. She leaned back in her chair, gently waving her newspaper screen, and, being satisfied that she was breaking the news for M. de Montmirail with the most considerate tenderness, she let her eyes wander round the room as she talked. But presently they fell on the child's face, and she stopped suddenly.

"Mon Dieu, Antoinette! What is the matter?" she cried. Antoinette was deadly pale: even her lips were white, and she was struggling to speak. At first, she could hardly utter a sound; then she screamed out, "Papa!" and the shrill agonised cry must have pierced through walls and doors, for he came hurriedly into the room a moment afterwards, and the child flung herself into his arms in a wild passion of crying. With many caressing words he lifted her up, and absolutely carried her away, leaving Monsieur and Madame de Cernay to express their sentiments to each other.

These sentiments were hardly well defined at once; but they found a very decided voice later, when the Marquis's two friends were driving back in their omnibus to Saint Bernard through the still pouring rain.

"I certainly would not be her stepmother, the spoilt child!" cried Madame de Cernay, with shrieks of laughter.

"She has gained her point; she will not have a stepmother at all," said the Baron.

"I call his weakness scandalous. Did you understand? He wishes to put an end at once to all negotiations; says that his chief object was the good of his child, and that he will not make her miserable. On my faith, that child has something to answer for. He is too amiable, that dear Achille; absolutely soft, ridiculous, insane, absurd. To let the fancies of a child overturn family arrangements in that sort of way! Better marry ten wives than make oneself a slave to a girl of fourteen. Good Heavens! that a friend of mine should be such a fool!"

M. de Cernay gnashed his teeth, clenched his fist, and thumped on the cushion.

"Well, our little plan is spoilt, that is all," said his wife, "for my aunt had a better match in view for Béatrice, and only listened to this to please me. Well, we shall see. Madame the mother-in-law may interfere, and bring 'la petite' to her senses. I know she wishes for more money in the family. It is a joke, indeed, if a poor man can't marry again, because his little daughter says no."

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